

**COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
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**STATEMENT OF
THE HONORABLE ENI F.H. FALEOMAVAEGA
CHAIRMAN**

**before the
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ASIA, THE PACIFIC, AND THE
GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT**

**Agent Orange:
What Efforts Are Being Made To Address The Continuing Impact Of Dioxin In Vietnam?**

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Last year, the Subcommittee held an historic hearing with the U.S.-Vietnam Dialogue Group and the Aspen Institute regarding our forgotten responsibility to the victims of Agent Orange. To my knowledge, this was the first time in the history of the U.S. Congress that a hearing has been held on Agent Orange which included the views of our Vietnamese counterparts and, today, I thank the Dialogue Group for agreeing once more to update us on what efforts are being made to address the continuing impact of dioxin in Vietnam.

This subject, though uncomfortable for some, is important to me because in 1966 I joined the U.S. Army and was deployed to Vietnam in 1967 where I served in Nha Trang as a young soldier. My brother, Tau, also served, as did millions of Americans. None of us knew then what we know now. We did not know if we would come back in a body bag or live to see our loved ones.

How my brother and I made it home, I do not know, but we did, and two years ago, for the first time in nearly 40 years, I returned to Vietnam in honor of those who did not. Although my brother passed away in 2004, I wore his aloha shirt so he could return to Vietnam, too.

Some forty year later, Vietnam is not the same. And neither is the United States. Today, it is the policy of the United States to normalize relations with Vietnam. In part, normalizing relations means coming to terms with our past, and I commend the U.S.-Vietnam Dialogue Group on Agent Orange for openly discussing ways in which the U.S. Congress can be of help.

As I noted at last year's hearing, it is estimated that from 1961 to 1971 the U.S. military sprayed more than 11 million gallons of Agent Orange in Vietnam. Agent Orange was manufactured under Department of Defense (DOD) contracts by several companies including

Dow Chemical and Monsanto. Dioxin, a toxic contaminant known to be one of the deadliest chemicals made by man, was an unwanted byproduct and is thought to be responsible for most of the medical problems associated with exposure to Agent Orange.

According to the Congressional Research Service (CRS), “Vietnamese advocacy groups claim that there are over three million Vietnamese suffering from serious health problems caused by exposure to the dioxin in Agent Orange.” CRS also reports that “a 1995 study of over 3,200 Vietnamese nationals found average TEQ blood levels were nearly six times higher among the people from sprayed areas compared to people from unsprayed areas; average breast milk levels were nearly four times higher, and average fat tissue levels were over 24 times higher. A separate study of blood dioxin levels of Da Nang residents reported TCDD concentrations more than 100 times globally acceptable levels. Elevated TCDD concentrations were also found in blood samples of Bien Hoa residents.”

Despite these findings, as CRS notes, “one area of continued disagreement between the U.S. and Vietnamese governments is the attribution of medical conditions to exposure to Agent Orange related dioxin. However, the list of conditions developed by the Vietnamese Red Cross and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs significantly overlap, indicating some agreement on the health effects.”

Assessments of the environmental consequences of dioxin in Vietnam are ongoing, with serious contamination having been found at so-called “hot spots,” or more specifically at ex-U.S. military bases at Bien Hoa, Da Nang, Phu Cat, Nha Trang, and at a former U.S. military base in the ALuoi Valley. Yet the U.S. State Department and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) are only providing technical assistance and financial support for containment and remediation efforts in and around the Da Nang airport, and support is minimal, with less than \$6 million being appropriated for environmental remediation and health care assistance.

In contrast, from 2003 to 2006, the U.S. appropriated \$35.7 billion for Iraq reconstruction. For Germany, according to the Congressional Research Service, “in constant 2005 dollars, the United States provided a total of \$29.3 billion in assistance from 1946-1952 with 60% in economic grants and nearly 30% in economic loans, and the remainder in military aid.” Total U.S. assistance to Japan for 1946-1952 was roughly \$15.2 billion in 2005 dollars, of which 77% was grants and 23% was loans.

Why can't we do more for our U.S. veterans and the people of Vietnam? We can and should more, and this is why I am fully committed to doing everything I can to bring attention to this issue, and make it right. As a Pacific Islander, I have a special affinity for the people of Vietnam and what it means to have been exposed to a horrifying array of disease.

From 1946 to 1958, the United States detonated 66 nuclear weapons in the Marshall Islands including the first hydrogen bomb, or Bravo shot, which was 1,000 times more powerful than the bomb dropped on Hiroshima. Acknowledged as the greatest nuclear explosion ever detonated, the Bravo test vaporized 6 islands and created a mushroom cloud 25 miles in diameter. If one were to calculate the net yield of tests conducted by the U.S. in the Marshall

Islands, it would be equivalent to the detonation of 1.7 Hiroshima bombs every day for twelve years.

Clearly, the U.S. nuclear testing program exposed the people of the Marshall Islands to severe health problems and genetic anomalies for generations to come. The results of these tests were and continue to be devastating and ceased only when nuclear clouds carried radioactive materials from the Pacific Islands to the mainland where strontium 90 was found in milk products from Minnesota and Wisconsin.

To this day, in the same way the U.S. denies the damage it did in Vietnam which went beyond the scope of war and affected the lives of innocent civilians, the U.S. also refuses to accept responsibility for what it did in the South Pacific, only making minimal efforts to clean-up its environmental mess and even less to compensate the people it unfairly exposed to deadly disease throughout generations of time.

As a nation committed to lending a helping hand and with America ready to lead once more, we can and must do better, and I commend the U.S.-Vietnam Dialogue Group for doing its part to strengthen our bilateral relations in an effort to put our past behind us and focus on a future of cooperation and promise.

I now recognize our Ranking Member, the gentleman from Illinois, Mr. Manzullo.